

OPENING REMARKS

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I am very pleased to participate in the launching of a book that breaks new ground by focusing the gender lens on the court system...the guardians of justice in our country. Documenting the gender biases at personal, institutional and societal levels has been our continuing concern, thus, focusing on one of the pillars of the justice system, which the book does, is indeed a major accomplishment.

Engendering the court system is a major goal of feminist lawyers, advocates, educators, as well as health and social researchers and workers in the helping profession, who often have to contend with the realities of women's oppression, and of shocking statistics which reveal the pervasiveness of violence against women and children. Add to these are the difficulties of obtaining justice in the light of prevailing beliefs and gender biases in the judicial system. Chief Justice Davide, in his foreword to this book, notes that the study has the distinction of being the first of its kind in Asia. I am quite confident that this breakthrough research will inspire more studies toward engendering the justice system and strengthening the advocacy and action by legal professionals and practitioners.

In the academe, we have been quite fortunate that the College of Law and the UP Law Center have been active partners of our University Center for Women's Studies (UCWS) in the mission to engender the university and society. Quite a coincidence,

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but 13 years ago, from July 24 to 25, 1989, our newly established University Center for Women's Studies convened university women and leaders in the national community in a two-day workshop to discuss women's issues and priority concerns. I recall the big gathering of women friends and colleagues at the UP Law Center, which served as venue for the workshop. Long-time friend and legal advocate, Atty. Myrna Feliciano, who is senior author of the book we are launching today, has been our focal person for gender issues in the justice system. She was a member of our research team that pioneered in the study of family violence in the Philippines in a comprehensive and integrated manner, way back in 1996. In 1997, we published the book, *Breaking the Silence: the Realities of Family Violence in the Philippines and Recommendations for Change*. Published in 1997 as first in the series of publications on family violence, with UNICEF support, Prof. Feliciano reviewed the Philippine Laws related to family violence and the gender gaps that needed to be addressed. Dr. Carolyn F. Sobritchea, now Director of the Center, and well-known gender trainer was a key member of the Stop VAWC project team. Indeed, in the UCWS, we had committed ourselves, not only to engendering the university curricula, but also to intensifying research on gender concerns/issues, gender-sensitive training and outreach activities. I am proud to say that feminist advocates in the university networking with members of civil society have helped in effectively lobbying for the passage of bills, e.g., on rape and sexual harassment. In our most recent project with the Department of Health on monitoring the progress and impact of intervention programs to stop gender violence, once again the critical importance of the legal system and the courts in particular, figured prominently. These have been some of our responses to the global challenge to eliminate VAW.

We applaud the authors of this book, *Gender Sensitivity in the Court System*, for their efforts – Atty. Feliciano, Dr. Sobritchea, Atty. Gatmaytan and Atty. Vargas. Indeed, the long-term solution which the group advocates – i.e., for the Supreme Court, to consider mandating courses on gender issues in the law, in law schools so that students may become gender-sensitized early on – will find support from many of us.

As founding director of the UCWS, I am very pleased with the progress we have made in engendering the university and society. We recognize and thank our many partners and donor-institutions, the UNDP and the Ford Foundation for their contributions in our common quest for a gender-equitable world.

Congratulations and *Mabuhay!*